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Contact: Bonnie Franklin: bfrankli@ramapo.edu or Rosa Diaz-Mulryan: rmulryan@ramapo.edu

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RAMAPO COLLEGE PROFESSOR AUTHORS BOOK ON AMERICAN HISTORY

(Mahwah) – Dr. Stephen Rice, associate professor of American Studies at Ramapo College of New Jersey, is the author of the recently published *Minding the Machine: Language of Class in Early Industrial America*.

In the book, Rice offers a new understanding of class formation in America during the several decades before the Civil War. This was the period in the nation's early industrial development when travel by steamboat became commonplace, the railroad altered concepts of space and time and Americans experienced the beginning of factory production. These changes raised questions about what machinery would accomplish and whether it would promote equality or widen the distance between rich and poor.

“It is important to understand how Americans historically have struggled over the question of what it means to think of American society as a class society,” Rice says. “The period I study in my book, the middle decades of the nineteenth century, was when the phrases ‘working class’ and ‘middle class’ were first used with the essential meanings they have now. Today we continue to struggle with questions about class inequality and class authority. My hope is that the book will help us understand something about the subtle ways in which ideas about class circulate through society.”

Minding the Machine shows how members of a new middle class laid claim to their social authority and minimized the potential for class conflict by playing out class

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relations on less contested social and technical terrains. As they did, they defined relations between shop owners (and the overseers, foremen, or managers they employed) and wageworkers.

Rice presents discussions of the mechanics' institute movement, the manual labor school movement, popular physiology reformers and efforts to solve the seemingly intractable problem of steam boiler explosions. The author began compiling information on the topic when he researched his doctoral dissertation in the American Studies program at Yale University in the early nineties. Much of the information is based on original source material including books, pamphlets and periodical articles published between 1820 and 1860.

Minding the Machine, published by the University of California Press, is available online, www.ucpress.edu/books/pages/9273.html. It is also available through online booksellers including Amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com.

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